

ON THE

DUTY OF MEDICAL MEN

IN RELATION TO THE

TEMPERANCE MOVEMENT.

BY

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THE Temperance Movement, like all other great works of reform, has brought out one of the saddest features of fallen human nature. It has served to show how blind man is to his own best interests,—how utterly opposed he is to anything that would interfere with the free and unrestrained indulgence of his animal passions. How difficult has it ever been to persuade men to prefer the good to the bad, the true to the false, the light to the darkness. What a humiliating, and, to a reformer, perplexing fact it is, that men who know or might know the right, deliberately pursue the wrong; and that, in the hardness of their hearts and stiffness of their necks they despise and reject all schemes for their moral and spiritual elevation! There is hardly anything more calculated to grieve a good man than to witness the folly and infatuation of those who, to their own

hurt, try to thwart his benevolent designs or spurn away the blessings which he offers them. What more fitted to excite our pity than to see our fellow-men obstinately and wilfully blind to their danger, their duty, and their real good! Not more sharp is the pain of "benefits forgot," than that of needed benefits refused. Our Saviour shed tears of sorrow and compassion because Jerusalem did not and would not know the things which belonged to her peace. And how bitterly does the true philanthropist often lament that insane prejudice which blinds his deluded fellow-men to the things that pertain to their physical and moral advancement! How often during the last forty years has the Temperance reformer had to bewail the terribly fatal stupidity of those who, despising alike the warnings of Scripture, the teachings of nature, and the lessons of experience, yield themselves up the willing dupes and victims of the mocker, alcohol! And not only has he had to bear the mortification of being met with a direct refusal of, and contempt for, his good offices, but he has had to endure the chilling influence of cold and indifferent spectators, the hostility of malevolent opponents, and the provoking remonstrances of those "miserable comforters" who are for ever pointing out to him how he is creating difficulties for himself, by the injudiciousness, in mode or time, of his temperance advocacy; or telling him that he is engaged in a hopeless and impossible task, and wasting his time and energies in a wholly utopian, however well-intentioned, enterprise. With all these discouragements from so-called friends and open foes, what could have sustained him in his noble work, or saved him from despair in the prosecution of so unpopular an undertaking as that of benefiting an unwilling race, but a disinterested and unconquerable love of his species, and a well-founded conviction of the truth of those doctrines which he beseeches them to believe and accept? For truly, but for that philanthropy and that conviction which never fail him, the slow and almost imperceptible progress of the Temperance movement would almost warrant him in giving up the unequal contest. Notwithstanding many years of anxious thought and earnest labour, the people still err through wine, and through strong drink are out of the way. Even the priest and the prophet err through strong drink, and all tables are full of vomit

and filthiness. Hundreds of breweries and distilleries deluge the land with their poisonous liquors; and tens of thousands of our countrymen go down in the pestiferous flood. The prayers and the labours of Temperance workers seem to have been employed in vain against a foe which, in spite of all that has been done or attempted, is draining the nation's life-blood away. The enemy is still in our midst, as haughty and malignant as ever, and nearly all that we have been able to do has been to discover and lament his great strength. But even this is something. The knowledge of the difficulties of our task, and of the strong points of our enemy's defence, is the first, and one of the most essential conditions of success. It matters not that there is a regular army of 170,000 men (publicans), with almost unlimited resources, opposed to us; it matters not that they are thoroughly armed and organised, and that their movements are directed by strategists of great skill; it matters not that they are united as one man in their aims and efforts, and are determined to retain, if not extend, their already conquered territory; it matters not that they care little for the lives and happiness of their fellow-men. Doubtless all these things are against us; but knowing as we now do, and as I shall try to show, "wherein their great strength lieth," it becomes our duty and our policy to bring our forces to bear upon this one position, and, if we make a persistent and combined attack upon this, I am persuaded that all their other advantages will avail them little. There are various other strongholds (which I shall mention presently) which it will be necessary for the Temperance army to storm before it can attain to final victory; but the strongest and most important one of all, because it is the key of all the rest, is what may be called *Fort Medical*. Medical practice, and medical teaching, and perhaps medical silence on the subject altogether, have begotten and fostered the popular belief that alcohol is one of the good creatures of God. The medical profession is responsible for the originating and perpetuating of the great mistake that alcohol is a wholesome thing. If this were so, there would be no need for, nor meaning in, a crusade against it. But this is not so. The very A B C of the Temperance cause consists in this, that alcohol is a poison. That is the very first principle, the foundation, the justification, the *raison-d'être*,

of the Temperance reform. And it is the ignorance of the people (encouraged as it has been by the attitude of the medical profession towards the Temperance movement), with regard to the nature, properties, and real value of alcoholic drinks, that has constituted hitherto an almost impregnable barrier to the progress of truth on this subject. This is the first and most important obstacle to be overcome, for not till this is removed can we expect to surmount those that lie beyond it. It lies at the very threshold of our undertaking. Who has put and kept it there? Most certainly the medical profession. For anything that by far the larger number of medical men have done—in fact, in consequence of what most of them have done—the people might be, and the majority of them actually are, ignorant of the fact that alcohol is a poison—that it always and inevitably injures the structures of the healthy body when brought into contact with them. They imagine it is a harmless agent, and as it affords them a certain amount of gratification, they drink it—with what results let every one's experience tell—instead of regarding it as a deleterious thing, and abstaining from it, and so escaping its injurious effects. The medical profession has not, as it was its duty to do, taught the people that alcohol, whether absolutely hurtful or not, is at any rate a perfectly useless article of food or drink; that it neither does nor can do any good to the healthy body; and that the notion that it supports the vital powers, nourishes and strengthens the enfeebled frame, and exerts a preservative influence on the system by which it actually prevents the lighting up of disease, is a delusion and a snare which has been the ruin of thousands. Neither has the medical profession been mindful of its high mission when it failed to point out the absurdity and the evils of supposing that, whilst its merits as a beverage may have been overrated, it is a medicine of most miraculous power, and so universally applicable and useful as to constitute it a panacea which may be safely prescribed by almost anybody for almost anything. And this delusion regarding the harmlessness or actual usefulness of alcohol as a beverage and as a medicine is held by such a large number of the people that comparatively few are left who discard it altogether as a noxious thing, pure and simple. And the result of this almost universal belief in the medicinal and

dietetic *virtues* of alcohol is an almost universal belief that it is *right* to use it. Hence the support which the Church, or at least professing Christians, give to the liquor traffic, constituting *Fort Ecclesiastical*—the second in natural sequence and in importance of the strongholds to which I have referred. From this almost universal belief that it is *right* to use it, naturally follows its almost universal *actual use*. Hence the drinking customs of society, forming the third stronghold of the spirit-trade, or *Fort Social*. And from this again arises the almost universal demand for it. Hence the licensing of the manufacture and sale of alcoholic liquors, forming what may be called *Fort Legal*. Here we have the entire traffic supported and protected by four great fortresses, of which the first is the key of the other three; for if that could be stormed, these would very soon have to surrender. And with shame be it said, that this powerful and all-important stronghold, behind which the whole army of liquordom shelters itself, has been built, armed, and manned by the noble profession of medicine! For the extensive use of alcoholic drinks and its co-extensive evils are attributable mainly to the existence and propagation of the great and fundamental error that alcohol is a *necessary medicine*, a *useful beverage*, and at any rate a *harmless luxury*. This is the great delusion for which the profession is accountable, and which is filling our land with lamentation and weeping and great mourning. This is the corner-stone which supports the whole edifice of the drink-traffic.

What reply can our honourable profession make to the awful impeachment brought against it by every intelligent student of the Temperance question, that its members, as a body, are the very mainstay of that traffic and of those customs which have brought misery and ruin to so many households, and which constitute a perpetual “carnival of sensuality, crime, and death”? Medical men may deny that they are in any way to blame for the present state of things, but that they are is a simple and easily demonstrated fact, asserted by all who have given much attention to the matter. On the one hand, the people refuse to believe that intoxicating drinks are injurious in their very nature. On the other, the people’s medical advisers either teach, by precept and example, that they are *not* injurious, or manifest

an indifference to the evils produced by their use, which implies that they do not think them injurious. It matters little whether it is what they teach or what they do not teach that is the cause of the popular belief and popular custom; for medical men are just as culpable if they do not dispel this error, as if they actually and directly taught it. They are just as responsible for its consequences, because it is their special province and privilege to diffuse that light and knowledge which alone could prevent them. For to whom can the Temperance movement look, to whom should it look, for aid in exposing this pernicious falsehood but to the medical profession? To whom else should a community suffering from the physical consequences of a physical poison appeal, not only for their cure, but for their prevention? And is the medical profession, as the guardian of the public health, faithfully discharging the duty thus plainly indicated? Does it raise a note of warning against the notion that alcoholic liquors are a harmless luxury? and does it show, and act as if it believed, that the use of them as such is the known and preventible cause of a large proportion of all disease? Does it as assiduously inculcate the avoidance and removal of this cause of the drink-plague as it does that of cholera, for instance? Do medical men take any trouble to undeceive those who think that alcoholic liquors nourish the body and support the strength, and who drink them accordingly, "knowing not that it is for their life"? Do they raise a loud and unceasing protest against this wholesale system of self-poisoning, and point out the fatal mistake of supposing that alcohol is a food? Ours has been called a noble, philanthropic, God-like art; can we make good its claims to these epithets so long as we fail to use our utmost endeavours to rid mankind of the ascertained cause, direct or indirect, of nearly all the ills that flesh is heir to? Do we discountenance a habit, founded on false ideas regarding alcohol, which transforms the "paragon of animals," who in action is so like an angel, in apprehension so like a God, into a being whose tastes and aspirations are only earthly, sensual, and devilish? And by doing all this, the medical profession would be simply undoing what it has done. Is not, therefore, its duty plain? Who is to free the world of this deadly error, which is at the root of the liquor-traffic and all its evils, if

medical men do not? Who else *can* do it, if they regard it with indifference, as if it were only a trifling error, or actually propagate it, as if it were not an error at all? And yet, notwithstanding this delusion and its lamentable effects, and notwithstanding the obvious duty of medical men to dispel the one and thereby prevent the other, how few members of the "healing art divine" seem at all concerned at the loss of health and life occasioned by this unnecessary and suicidal use of alcohol! How few of them seem to be aware that they are responsible for the evils arising from an ignorance which it is in their power, and in theirs chiefly if not only, to dispel! Surely they cannot believe that they are mere functionaries who have to do only with the body and its ailments, and that anything beyond this is out of their province! Surely they do not hold that "wicked and inhuman doctrine, that it is no matter what happens after them"! that they are any less responsible for the moral consequences of their acts or their omissions, professional or otherwise, than other people! or that they are any less bound to discharge those moral obligations belonging to them as *men*, because they have certain official duties as *medical* men! In view of the havoc that drink makes among our fellow-creatures, should not our sympathy and our humanity be wide enough to enable us to say,

"Homo sum,—nihil humani alienum a me puto"?

Or are they to be only in proportion to the liberality of those who require our aid? I know that our profession can compare favourably with any other as regards the amount of gratuitous, and often thankless, service it bestows upon the sons and daughters of affliction; but even gratuitous service, when needed, is nothing more than the duty of all who can render it, and it is none the less so because it may not lie exactly within their usual sphere. The question is, Is help required, and can we give the required help? If so, we may, like the priest and the Levite of old, unfeelingly pass by on the other side; but it is only the Samaritan who shows mercy on the needy sufferer, just because he is needy, that acts the part of a true man and a brother. Thus would I try to arouse my brethren to a sense of their duty in relation to the Temperance movement. As *medical men*,

possessed of the knowledge for lack of which the people are perishing, and as *men*, bound, like all other men, to benefit to the utmost extent in their power, not only themselves, but all their race, they are specially obligated to employ, in the interests of humanity, both their ordinary and their extraordinary qualifications to remove one of the greatest curses of mankind.

But here some one will object that what I have taken for granted is not proved. I have been assuming that alcohol is a poison—always hurtful as a beverage, always useless as an article of diet, and always unnecessary, at the very least, as a medicine. I have been assuming that the medical profession knows all this, but has allowed the people to remain in ignorance of it, to their great injury, and that therefore the medical profession is responsible for the consequences of this ignorance. The objection is, that medical men do *not* know all this, but positively deny some of it. Now, admitting for the sake of argument that they do not know what I supposed they knew, I reply that they *might* know it, if they would, and that they are as responsible for the knowledge they might and should possess as for that which they already do possess. Where a man's ignorance is inexcusable, the results of it are also inexcusable. It ought to be known to all medical men that a large and increasing number of earnest and scientific inquirers have discovered, after patient investigation, careful experiment, and close observation, that alcohol is incapable of contributing anything whatever to the nourishment of the body, and that disease can be even more successfully treated without it than with it. This being so, have medical men who have no *reason* to doubt it any *right* to doubt it? Have those who have never put the matter to an adequate test any right to dispute the opinion of intelligent and conscientious observers, who, animated by no other desire than to know the truth, and having examined both sides of the question, have been compelled to deny both the virtues of, and the necessity for, alcohol? Could anything more absurd or more unjust be conceived than to affirm the impossibility of a thing which you have neither tried nor examined, and that in the face of the clearest evidence to the contrary? What stronger proof of prejudice or of stupidity could be desired than is found in the obstinacy with which the majority of

medical men deny that fever can be treated not only as well but much better on the non-alcoholic plan, when they have never sufficiently tried it, and when large numbers who *have* tried it assert the fact? What better proof can be given that a thing *can* be done, than that it *has been* done, and is being done everyday? If the experiment has succeeded, ought not that to settle the question? and that the experiment has succeeded, the reports of numerous eminent and experienced physicians abundantly testify. Surely common sense will tell any candid mind that, *cæteris paribus*, the men who have given the subject the fairest and most extensive investigation are the most competent to offer an opinion upon it; and common justice requires that this opinion shall be respected and acted upon in preference to one which has not equally trustworthy evidence to support it. Hence I maintain that it is the duty of medical men either (1) to discard alcohol altogether, on the strength of the verdict which a large portion of the profession (not to mention competent judges outside the profession) have pronounced against it; or else (2) to examine the matter for themselves with an earnest and sincere desire to know the simple truth. Considering the incalculable evils which so many truthful, unprejudiced, and thoroughly qualified men attribute solely to the common and medicinal use of alcohol (such use being founded on false notions of the nature and real value of the drink), I hold that it is the bounden duty of all who are in any degree responsible for this use of it, to give the whole subject that honest and attentive consideration which its importance demands. This would be a more philosophic, honourable, and philanthropic course to pursue than that so often adopted by medical men, of refusing either to study the question for themselves or to be instructed by those who have studied it. I should have thought that, if no other or higher consideration were sufficient, the honour of their profession would be enough to arouse them to defend it from the serious charge of contributing, either knowingly or in wilful ignorance, to the miseries of the human race.

But suppose that, after having given the subject the necessary investigation, they still believe that alcohol is an indispensable article of the "*Materia Medica*," what then? What if some medical men *have* actually done so, and have been forced to the conclusion that alcohol is a useful food and

a necessary medicine? Then I tell them that it is their duty (3) to choose the lesser of two evils. Prescribe alcohol, either dietetically or medicinally, and you frequently create or resuscitate, and always run a risk of creating or resuscitating, supposing the patient survives, an uncontrollable and ultimately fatal appetite for intoxicating drink. Thus in your desire to cure one disease, which many believe could be cured more certainly and more safely by other means, you administer a remedy which may and often does produce another disease of a much more serious character, inasmuch as it involves not only physical but moral injury to the patient, and untold misery to his friends. You also give rise to, and confirm, that widespread faith in the necessity for and remedial powers of alcoholic liquors, which I have said is at the very basis of the drinking customs, and is the remote origin of the traffic itself and all its evils. For while I do not say that all who drink do so because they think the drink is good for them, I do say that all *begin* to drink ignorant of the fact, and because they are ignorant of the fact, that alcohol is inherently and essentially bad for them. And this ignorance is the result of the prescription and recommendation by medical men of the various intoxicating productions of the brewer and distiller. And remember that the advocates of alcohol can claim no special advantages for the alcoholic treatment which are not also claimed to a superior degree for the non-alcoholic treatment, by those who have expunged this agent from their list of remedies altogether.

What, on the other hand, are the evils which it is alleged would arise from the entire prohibition of the internal use of alcohol in any form or for any purpose? Perhaps retarded recovery now and then, and in some cases no recovery at all (both of which, mark you, have been known (!) to follow even when alcohol was used), with, it may be, some little unpopularity for the medical attendant. This is all that can be said against the disuse of alcohol. But then, as a set-off to this, you will have all those infinitely greater evils arising from its use, which I have pointed out, entirely prevented. Now, which of these alternatives should commend itself to the conscience of such humane men as the members of the medical profession generally are? Unquestionably the latter. It is better, if necessary (although

I must remind the reader that I don't admit the necessity), to risk the health and lives of a few than the health and happiness and lives of the many. It is better to insure the safety of the many than to render it insecure for the sake of conferring a very questionable benefit on a few. And physicians ought to remember that they have more than their patients or the *present* condition of their patients to consider. They have to consider the moral effects of their treatment on the community at large, and the *future* moral and physical effects of their treatment on the patients themselves. I have been told by medical men that they have nothing to do with the moral effects of a treatment which they conscientiously believe to be proper and necessary; and that if a patient chooses to make it a pretext for becoming a drunkard, that is none of their business; it is a matter between him and his Maker. But if the medical treatment makes him that he *cannot but choose* to be a drunkard; if it produces a physical disease which robs him of the power to abstain from alcoholic liquors, then it does become the business, and the very serious business, of the medical man whose treatment produced this disease. If any act of the physician has had any influence for evil on the man's conduct, or on his capability of regulating his conduct, and especially if it is known beforehand that that act *may* have this influence, then I hold that the physician is morally responsible for the man's misconduct, and morally bound to refrain from repeating such an act, even though, as in the case of the medical prescription of alcohol, it may be *intended* for the man's benefit. From these considerations alone, I think the conscience of every medical man must tell him that the only proper use of alcohol is its entire *disuse*.

But if the superior importance of the present physical well-being of an individual to his future physical and moral well-being and that of the community demand that alcohol be used at all hazard, is it not the duty of medical men (4) to reduce the hazard to a minimum by a more careful and scientific *mode* of using it? If alcohol is a poisonous drug, why should it not be prescribed in the same way, procured at the same place, and employed with the same care, as other powerful and dangerous medicines? Why should the patient, or even his friends, know that it is prescribed at all?

Doctors write out a Latin prescription for other medicines, and never think of telling their patients the names of the various ingredients. Why not do the same with regard to alcoholic stimulants? Why teach society to regard the publichouse as a necessary adjunct to the apothecary's shop? Should not the apothecary's shop be sufficient? And, then, what could be more random and unscientific than the way in which these drinks are allowed to be used? It is almost always left to the discretion, or indiscretion rather, of the patient himself, to settle what the dose and its frequency shall be, and how long the remedy is to be taken! Is it any wonder that, with such a system of treatment as this, many become drunkards before they are cured, or that many refuse to be cured at all, as that would necessitate the giving up of a fascinating medicine? Medical men might do much, even in small matters like these, to guard their patients and the general public from the contraction of drinking habits, and it is their duty to make use of every means calculated in any degree to counteract those evils which have resulted from their teaching and practice in the past.

And are they not called upon, above all others, to aid the Temperance cause by (5) personal total abstinence? Apart from the absolute duty of every man to abstain from the unnecessary use of a poison, it is pre-eminently the duty of medical men, who are naturally and justly considered guides in all that pertains to the preservation of health, to see that the powerful influence of their example is on the side of virtue and sobriety. Their superior knowledge of the poisonous nature of alcohol implies a greater obligation to abstain from it; but it is their stronger and wider influence which, in an especial manner, lays them under a deeper responsibility to set the people a safe example in this matter, and incurs upon them a deeper guilt if their example leads the people astray. God's laws, physical and moral, are impartial in their operation; and medical men cannot violate a physical law, or set aside a moral obligation, with impunity, any more than other people. Besides, the nature of their professional duties, the weighty issues dependent, humanly speaking, upon their skill and care, the priceless interests entrusted to their keeping, demand that they shall avoid that which, both Scripture

and experience declare, causes men to err in vision and stumble in judgment.

And while they thus draw by example, let them not neglect the frequent opportunities presented to them of disseminating Temperance principles. At the bedside, in the medical society, on the platform, and in the press, they may do much to redeem the past, by teaching the people the whole truth about alcohol; by discountenancing the drinking customs; and by identifying themselves more thoroughly with the advocacy of that great sanitary, social, and moral reform—the Temperance movement.

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